

COMMENTARY

Risk management, clear thinking key to safe summer

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Public Affairs

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AFB, Ohio (AFMCNS)—Losing 66 Air Force people to private motor vehicle and seven to non-traffic-related accidents in 2003 prompted officials here to implement the most aggressive 101 Critical Days of Summer safety campaign in recent history.

In a letter to field organizations, Gen. Gregory S. Martin, Air Force Materiel Command commander, said everyone, regardless of rank, age, sex or position, must be more aware of increased safety during the upcoming season where outdoor and recreational mishaps tend to rise.

"This is the time when we need to place extra emphasis on good decision making and taking the responsibility for the personal well-being of our families and ourselves," General Martin said. "We must make safety awareness a part of our everyday lives—on and off-duty."

The general said people must make sure they and their family members use seat belts, helmets, lifejackets and other protective equipment all the time when doing related activities. Additionally, he said emphasizing alcohol awareness and its impact on AFMC

members in a recreational setting, not drinking and driving and using designated drivers is a paramount need.

The 101 Critical Days campaign begins Memorial Day and goes through Labor Day in September. It is the time where carelessness and fun-loving times sometimes takes control over careful thinking and gets people hurt or killed.

To help wrestle this problem and see fewer people die due to recklessness, John Sheehan, AFMC ground safety chief, encourages people to use risk management techniques and think about what might happen in any given situation and what their reaction might be.

"Exercising risk management in everything we do, on- and off-duty is the key to enjoying safe activities," Mr. Sheehan said. "We do a pretty good job with on-duty mishaps and fatalities because we have more control over how people conduct business. But people need to put those same ideals into practice with off-duty activities because the off-duty stuff can kill you just as dead as the on-duty things can."

Mr. Sheehan said if people apply the six steps of risk management, they can be reasonably assured there will be no surprises.

The six steps he referred to are:

Identifying hazards associated with a particular activity; assessing the impact each hazard has in relation to potential loss and severity; determining controls necessary to reduce or eliminate the hazards; making decisions as to accepting, avoiding or controlling the risk; following through to make sure appropriate controls are used; and monitoring the situation and adjusting as necessary to keep things under control.

Take driving a vehicle for example, he said, citing that two- and four-wheeled vehicles join forces to account for more than 80 percent of fatalities in the 2003, 101 Critical Days season. Using risk management techniques, an individual would first consider the hazards such as road conditions, traffic, impaired drivers, wildlife in the area and any unseen situations. The individual should also take into consideration his or her experience in driving their particular kind of vehicle and in whatever particular conditions.

After assessing the risk and analyzing the control measures, that individual might want to check the weather and drive accordingly; listen to local radio stations for road conditions; and travel outside peak-travel times, he said.

"Taking your time in unfamiliar areas and on gravel, slick roads and

curves never hurts either," he said.

Mr. Sheehan also suggests keeping road rage caged; not drinking and driving; driving defensively and being cautious on unfamiliar roads. Checking into alternate methods of traveling and taking spare parts and tools on extended trips can help travelers be prepared for the unexpected.

Everyone, including supervisors and managers, needs to continue strong interaction with their co-workers and encourage each other to emphasize safety throughout the 101 Critical Days of Summer, both in on- and off-duty activities, Mr. Sheehan said.

"This is the time of year where more activities are happening and therefore the risk of mishaps happening increase," he said. "With increased awareness and people taking the time to think about what might happen in any given situation, we can continue minimizing our mishaps and fatalities and bring our people back home safely."

General Martin agreed saying, "Everyone in this command is a valuable and needed member of our team. Let's use ORM to help us make smart decisions, for ourselves, for our families and for our friends. Our goal is to continue preserving the lives of our AFMC family by preventing mishaps."

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90

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS ROQUE J. VIDAURRI

898th Munitions Squadron
Nuclear Weapons Journeyman
90

AIRMAN 1ST CLASS TOMAS P. MATA

377th Medical Group
Bioenvironmental
Engineering Journeyman
90

SENIOR AIRMAN SANDRA Y. WEBSTER

377th Services Squadron
Services Journeyman
90

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377th Contracting Squadron

"It can be difficult balancing the requirements for what really amounts to working an additional part-time job. Performing my primary duties, as well as Honor Guard duties, at times means late nights and extra hours at work. However, the sense of pride and feeling of accomplishment I receive, knowing I'm giving something back to both past and present military members and their families, is well worth the sacrifice."



COMMENTARY

Freedom isn't free, it's been paid for in the blood of heroes

LT. COL. J. MATTHEW LYONS
58th Training Squadron

Can you remember where you were on October 29, 1992? I will never forget.

It was a stormy night in Ogden, Utah, as a 4-ship formation of Air Force and Army Special Operations MH-60 helicopters departed Hill AFB on a live-fire airfield assault mission, the culmination of a two-week joint forces exercise that had literally spanned the entire country.

Peering through night vision goggles from the copilot's seat of the lead helicopter, I strained to see through the blowing rain that lashed our flight.

At 9:15 p.m. the flight headed west across the Great Salt Lake and encountered near-zero visibility. Behind us, the pilot of the number-two aircraft developed spatial disorientation and unknowingly began descending toward the black surface of the water. An abrupt radio call from the number three helicopter gave us the first hint of trouble: "Chalk Two, pull up." At first the voice seemed unexcited, almost routine.

Already wired with tension, I sensed something was about to go terribly wrong. The voice returned, more insistent, more urgent this time.

"Chalk Two, PULL UP!"

From the back of our helicopter, the flight engineer yelled "Climb, climb!" as the second aircraft jerked up out of its dive and headed right at us. As the flight began breaking up, the trail helicopter, call sign MERIT 84, started a turn away from the formation. In the inky blackness, the aircraft

entered an undetected descent and a few seconds later hit the water at 120 knots, exploding instantaneously. In that blinding flash, twelve Army Rangers and Air Force air commandos—some of my friends and squadron-mates, along with some of the sharpest Special Forces officers and non-commissioned officers in the country—were killed.

Turning back toward the crash, a surreal sight filled the windscreen, a sight forever etched into my memory. Two fireballs blazed away on the water, surrounded by dark shapes in the wreckage. In the harsh orange glow of burning fuel, the shapes became the outlines of bodies floating in the dense salt water. I couldn't believe what we were seeing. Miraculously, one man—the pilot—had been thrown clear and survived. But that fact, which wasn't immediately known, did nothing to temper the overwhelming tragedy before our eyes.

The weeks that followed were a blur of shock, mourning and gut-wrenching emotion. After enduring the accident investigation, we returned home to Eglin AFB, Fla. and began literally criss-crossing the country going to one memorial or funeral service after another. From Florida we flew to Ft. Bragg, N.C., to the hilly countryside of southern Ohio and to the coastal mountains of northern California.

Finally, on a crisp autumn day in mid-November, this terrible odyssey finally ended as our squadron commander was laid to rest with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery.

I can still recall the reverent hush as we stood graveside before the flag-draped casket that afternoon. As the service ended, the sharp cracks of the rifle salute reverberated loudly in the stillness.

I will never forget, when the lonely notes of "Taps" began to sound, how the muted autumn sunlight caught and glistened from a single tear that hung silently on the cheek of the master sergeant standing at rigid attention beside me. In my own blurred vision, it sparkled there for one long, heart-breaking moment, the immense sorrow of the occasion in stark contrast to the beauty of the wooded hillside on which we stood.

Though that was a time of crushing sadness, to me that moment captured the devotion, the honor, the pride and the selfless sacrifice that defines our duty in the profession of arms as no other moment ever has, before or since.

More than 11 years have passed now since that fateful October night. In that time, many other men and women have also made the ultimate sacrifice, some in combat and some in training for war. Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom in particular have cost hundreds of lives, yet our cause is clearer than ever—securing our nation, defending our freedom and defeating the scourge of global terrorism.

As members of the Armed Forces, we must stand ready to carry out that mission with that same steadfastness shown by our fallen friends and fellow warriors. Our nation expects and demands it, and in no small way our very survival depends upon it.

"Hero" is a term that has been

banded about quite a bit lately. I've always had my own simple definition of a hero: an ordinary man or woman accomplishing the extraordinary, and doing so with integrity, skill and devotion. To me, the men aboard MERIT 84 were heroes. They answered a personal call to service and willingly trained in dangerous pursuits, preparing for the time when their specialized skills would be needed to serve our nation or to help an oppressed people in some far-off land. They took pride in doing well what others could not, or would not do. And they believed so much in what they were doing that they were ready to literally give their lives for it.

They set for us a fine example to follow, as have all who have gone before. And I believe their example charges us to do two things: to carry on their mission, and to remember their sacrifice.

As Memorial Day comes upon us once again, take a moment to pause and honor the commitment, devotion and selflessness shown by every fallen Airman, Soldier, Sailor and Marine. Remember, too, their families who have also borne a tremendous cost.

As President John F. Kennedy once said, "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and success of liberty."

Sometimes that price is very high indeed. Freedom isn't free, it's been paid for in the blood of heroes—let's not take it for granted. Remember them, with gratitude, and carry on.